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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000314

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER LE SY IS

SUBJECT: LEBANON: GERMAN INITIATIVE FOR NORTHERN BORDER
PILOT PROJECT

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b)

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SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Despite considerable planning and effort by German Federal Police officials who have been assigned to Beirut, it appears the German Pilot Border Project will not actually be implemented until sometime this summer. According to German representatives in Beirut, PM Siniora has given them verbal authority to move forward, but the German government desires formal authorization, which may require a problematic vote in the cabinet. Last week the German ambassador met with PM Siniora to discuss the issue, and next week, Germany's Interior Minister is scheduled for a follow-up meeting that is intended to complete the authorization process. The proposed project will test an integrated approach to border security that will coordinate the operations of the LAF, ISF, Surete General, and Customs. German representatives have made it clear that funding was still required. End summary.

STATUS AND IMPINGING FACTORS

¶12. (C) Embassy Beirut officers have been meeting on a regular basis with representatives of the German Federal Police (GFP) since November 2006. Initially, GFP Colonel Detlef Karioth and his team were working on the assumption that applicable provisions of UNSCR 1701 and informal Government of Lebanon (GOL) assurances provided sufficient authority to plan and implement the pilot program, which is intended to provide a secure northern border utilizing a centrally-coordinated, layered zone approach in which all cross-border traffic will be funneled through secure entry points equipped with advanced sensor equipment. The GFP sent a number of assessment teams to evaluate the terrain, discuss manning issues with ISF and LAF commanders, and calculate equipment and training needs. In mid-January, Colonel Karioth informed us that pending the receipt of approximately USD 4.0 million in funding, he hoped to begin placing the first elements of the project into the field by March/April.

¶13. (C) Since then, two factors appear to have delayed implementation: confirmed funding, and an apparent concern by the German government that political difficulties in Lebanon were preventing the issuance of formal authorization. On a number of occasions, GFP representatives also alluded to a concern that Germany would be "stuck" with a lengthy commitment, when what they were offering was a highly-focused, short-term assistance project of operational

expertise, knowledge transfer, and appraisal. Germany has reportedly approached the EU Council to ask if the EU would accept longer-term mentoring and support responsibilities for Lebanon's border security. They apparently received a frosty response. Whether the concern that they could be committing themselves for a protracted period has contributed to the unexpected delay in implementation is not known.

¶4. (C) There also appears to be a measure of ambivalence on the part of the Lebanese government. The pressure on the GOL to deal with the border issue in a more comprehensive and effective manner has put this project in the spotlight, even though at this stage, its scope is limited to only about 50 kms of the northern border. To GFP officers, this limitation is an important advantage in that it provides a more manageable test bed for the first-ever integration of Lebanon's traditionally "stovepiped" security services. According to Karioth, a wide range of issues have been overcome, from generic communications interoperability to the more profound challenge of sharing intelligence and executing operations in a joint environment. Following extensive consultations with senior ISF, LAF, Surete General, and Customs officials, the GFP project manager is confident these issues can be managed. But he has expressed concern that unrealistic expectations may distort timelines in an unhelpful manner. On several occasions, Karioth has emphasized that getting the disparate Lebanese security services to work as an integrated team will take time, because such a joint effort will be breaking long-established barriers.

¶5. (C) GFP officials believe the northern pilot project, once the concept is verified, could be expanded along the entire Syrian-Lebanese frontier. He cautioned that extension to the country's eastern border will require significant new

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personnel and material resources. They have confirmed that both LAF and ISF senior leadership are favorably inclined in that direction, but want to await "proof of concept" before accepting the increased responsibilities.

PROJECT SPECIFICS

¶6. (C) The German preliminary assessment team's estimated price tag for the pilot project was USD 5.0 million, though this figure was not grounded in precise cost analysis of the fully developed concept. The figure could vary considerably once the final equipment/training assessment team finishes its work in mid-March. Karioth maintained that difficulty in obtaining funding from his own government did not reflect a lack of support, but rather the "quirks" of the German foreign assistance funding process. In late February, he acknowledged that he did not think this problem could be resolved quickly, i.e., in time to execute the pilot in a timely manner, and was therefore requesting funds from several sources, including the EU and the U.S. (Note: The Danish government has committed itself to provide 1.0 million Euros toward the project, but has reportedly restricted this funding to training expenses. Karioth also noted dryly to us that the EU has approximately 6.0 million Euros set aside for projects such as this, but the organization "seems unable or unwilling to commit itself to this one." End note.)

¶7. (C) With regard to required GOL resources, both ISF and LAF senior commanders have verbally committed themselves to the necessary numbers, but have emphasized to GFP assessment teams that they lack the necessary equipment, particularly interoperable communications gear and reliable transport. The LAF has assigned the capable 5th Regiment, which is presently assigned to the northern sector and is familiar with the territory and existing cross-border traffic flows. For its part, ISF commander General Ashraf Rifi has promised to designate an ISF unit whose sole mission will be the border project. Under the proposed concept of operations,

ISF forces will operate in close cooperation with the LAF's 5th Regiment, as well as still-to-be-determined Surete General and Customs units. The joint headquarters for the operation is planned for the centrally located village of Aandqet, a few kilometers northeast of El Qbayat.

¶8. (C) The GNP team in Beirut has provided us with a preliminary equipment list which includes an extensive range of items, from communications and office equipment to explosives detection devices and vehicles. Where possible, this equipment was matched to one of four services already operating in the security sector. According to Embassy ODC, the list appears realistic for the planned mission, but it is difficult to judge this without a detailed "concept plan" that would explain the listed items and how they would be used. Embassy ODC believes that the project's cost will likely increase, perhaps significantly, once a completed concept plan is vetted against the requested equipment.

TIMING

¶9. (C) COL Karioth informed us that once the concept plan is finalized and accepted by the applicable security services, and funding and GOL approval is obtained, it would take approximately 60-90 days to fully implement the project along the northern sector. He then envisions a 90-day operational period, which should provide a firm database for analysis for the decision to extend the operation to other areas of Lebanon's frontier. (Note: Embassy ODC believes the planned implementation timeframe may be optimistic, particularly if the equipment list, and associated training, involves systems that usually require long lead times, such as secure communications gear. End note.) In late February, Karioth pledged to have the concept plan ready to distribute at the next meeting of the Border Group, a sub-group of the informal International Security Assistance Coordination Committee that donor nations hold each month in Beirut. The sub-group will meet next on March 2, but due to the senior level German meeting with PM Siniora next week, delivery of the concept plan may be delayed.

FELTMAN